

Members

Sen. Allen Paul, Chairperson
Sen. Michael Delph
Sen. Frank Mrvan
Sen. Richard Young
Rep. Richard McClain
Rep. James Baird
Rep. Scott Reske
Rep. David Niezgodski
Carol L. Riley
Klayton South
Lt. Gen. Carol Mutter
Jerry Hogan



COMMISSION ON MILITARY AND VETERANS AFFAIRS

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MEETING MINUTES¹

Meeting Date: August 31, 2011
Meeting Time: 2:00 P.M.
Meeting Place: State House, 200 W. Washington St., 130
Meeting City: Indianapolis, Indiana
Meeting Number: 1

Members Present: Sen. Allen Paul, Chairperson; Sen. Michael Delph; Sen. Richard Young; Rep. James Baird; Rep. David Niezgodski; Klayton South; Jerry Hogan.

Members Absent: Sen. Frank Mrvan; Rep. Richard McClain; Rep. Scott Reske; Carol L. Riley; Lt. Gen. Carol Mutter.

1. Call to Order and Introductions

Chairman Allen Paul called the first meeting of the Commission on Military and Veterans' Affairs to order at 2:05 PM. Members of the Commission introduced themselves to the audience. Chairman Paul asked staff to inform the Commission of it's charge during the 2011 interim. The Commission is charged with studying issues related to how the state meets the needs of Hoosiers returning from conflict abroad and veteran procurement preferences in state contracting.

2. Update from General Umbarger of the Indiana National Guard

General Umbarger provided the Commission with a presentation outlining the work the National Guard has done both in the state as well as abroad (Exhibit 1). The presentation also included information on programs available to soldiers returning from conflict abroad as well as soldiers with suicidal ideas. The General also provided information on a future deployment of more than 3,000 National Guard soldiers.

¹ These minutes, exhibits, and other materials referenced in the minutes can be viewed electronically at <http://www.in.gov/legislative> Hard copies can be obtained in the Legislative Information Center in Room 230 of the State House in Indianapolis, Indiana. Requests for hard copies may be mailed to the Legislative Information Center, Legislative Services Agency, West Washington Street, Indianapolis, IN 46204-2789. A fee of \$0.15 per page and mailing costs will be charged for hard copies.

In response to a question from Senator Michael Delph regarding how Camp Atterbury and the Muscatatuck Urban Training Complex (MUTC) ranked nationally, General Umbarger informed the Commission that at one time the U.S. Department of Defense utilized 13 training facilities. Currently, there are only 5 active training facilities, of which Camp Atterbury and the Muscatatuck Urban Training Complex remain. General Umbarger informed the Commission that the recent land acquisition plan for Camp Atterbury will only help to increase this base's activity in training future soldiers.

Senator Delph also asked about the current emphasis on agriculture and noncombatant training at the MUTC. General Umbarger responded the current emphasis is for American soldiers to withdraw from foreign wars. Currently, the armed forces are working on rebuilding Afghanistan by helping them shift their agricultural commodities from opium poppy plants to more conventional agricultural commodities.

Representative Jim Baird enquired if the family programs offered by the National Guard have been successful in assisting soldiers through times of hardship. General Umbarger informed the Commission that soldiers will always have issues, but there are no perfect solutions. However, General Umbarger emphasized that the National Guard currently has a foundation in place to address these issues provided that soldiers begin admitting they have problems and need help.

Representative David Niezgodski asked if the National Guard offered a toll-free help line for soldiers who needed help or if calls placed to another Indiana help line were forwarded to the National Guard. General Umbarger responded that the National Guard has their own number for services that soldiers can call. This number is also given to potential recruits to report any inappropriate behavior by National Guard recruiters.

Mr. Jerry Hogan asked the General about recruiting efforts in the National Guard. The General responded that recruiting efforts in Indiana have been much more successful than other states in the Northeast and the Northwest. The General attributed Indiana's success in recruiting to two major factors: the effect the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, still have on the men and women of the state and the fact that the National Guard is a gainful source of employment during the economic collapse.

3. Presentation from Tom Applegate, Director, Indiana Department of Veterans' Affairs (IDVA)

Director Tom Applegate provided the Commission with a presentation detailing the work of the Indiana Department of Veterans' Affairs (Exhibit 2). This presentation provided information on the balance of the Military Family Relief Fund and Veterans' Affairs Trust Fund, services offered to Hoosier veterans, progress made on facilities owned and operated by the Department of Veterans' Affairs, as well as legislative requests for the 2012 legislative session. These legislative requests include extending the duration of eligibility for hardship payments from the Military Family Relief Fund to three years, as well as extending Military Family Relief Fund benefit eligibility to members of the National Guard who are called for state active duty.

Director Applegate also informed the Commission the Yellow Ribbon program, offered by the IDVA, ensures that returning soldiers are aware of state benefits offered to them. Representatives of the IDVA attend welcome-home ceremonies to provide this information to returning soldiers.

Senator Delph asked Director Applegate about the delay in processing assistance payments from the National Guard Fund for needy men and women who serve in the National Guard. Senator Delph further enquired if the IDVA has looked into using the Military Family Relief Fund

to make these payments in order to expedite the payment process, with the understanding the money expended would be reimbursed from the National Guard Fund. Director Applegate replied the IDVA has yet to explore that option, but that it sounded like a good solution to the payment problems with the privately funded National Guard Fund.

When Senator Delph enquired if the legislature should provide a formalized structure to ensure Hoosier veterans get the help they need, information from the National Guard was given to the Commission that the current process is very informal but that a formalized structure may help ensure that soldiers get the services they need.

Director Applegate added that people understand the Military Family Relief Fund is for recently deployed soldiers, but there is a need for past veterans who need assistance. In these instances, the IDVA is forced to refer these veterans to Veteran Service Organizations for help. Director Applegate informed the Commission of a third, omitted legislative proposal, a Needy Veteran Program. This program would provide help for those that the Military Family Relief Fund program cannot and who have issues with the federal Veterans' Affairs eligibility.

Representative Niezgodski enquired if there have been application rejections for assistance from the Military Family Relief Fund. Director Applegate responded that because of the license plate sales generating adequate revenue for the fund, the IDVA has not had to decline any requests for assistance.

Mr. Jerry Hogan asked if there was any incentive for a veteran and/or the family of a veteran to move into the Indiana Veterans' Home as opposed to another veterans' home. Mr. Tony Stewart, Superintendent of the Indiana Veterans' Home, responded the Indiana Veterans' Home differs from other veterans' homes because it provides all necessary services on the premises.

4. Discussion of Subsequent Meetings of the Commission

Chairman Paul concluded the meeting by informing the Commission he would like to have three additional meetings. He suggested the next meeting would include a trip to Camp Atterbury and the Muscatatuck Urban Training Center and/or the Indiana Veterans' Home. The third and fourth meetings would include studying additional issues assigned to the Commission as well as discussing legislative proposals.

The meeting adjourned at 4:00 PM.